DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 297 107 CE 050 595

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TITLE The Status of Adult Education Historical Research in the United States.
PUB DATE Jul 86
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on the History of Adult Education (1st, Oxford, England, July 14-17, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; *Adult Education; *Adult Educators; *Educational Attitudes; *Educational History; Educational Philosophy; *Educational Research; *Educational Trends; High School Equivalency Programs; Postsecondary Education; Research Methodology

ABSTRACT

Early studies of adult education in the United States included James Truslow Adams' book, "Frontiers of American Culture: A Study of Adult Education in a Democracy" (1944), an unconvincing attempt to classify adult education instructions and programs and to establish the relation of democracy to adult education; C. Hartley Grattan's "In Quest of Knowledge" (1955), a defense of liberal education; and Malcolm Knowles' dissertation, "The Adult Education Movement in the United States" (1962), an attempt to rationalize, classify, and relate the parts of adult education. In 1976, a new interest in the history of adult education was signaled by a special bicentennial issue of "Adult Education," and interest in historical educational research was sparked by several preconferences and an occasional newsletter. Although the published output is small, three emphases were taken in later research. The first is an attempt to understand the heritage of the field, especially, the writers and theorists of adult education such as Eduard C. Lindeman. (An example is Moreland and Goldenstein's book, "Pioneers in Adult Education.") A second emphasis has been to analyze the ideology that underlies the work of adult educators (Robert Carlson, "The Quest for Conformity: Americanization through Education"). A third emphasis is on universal dimensions of patterns of learning (Cyril Houle's "Patterns of Learning: New Perspectives on Life-Span Education"). Social and cultural historians have studied adult education as related to the diffusion of knowledge, cultural intervention by the dominant class, and role or status changes by a subjugated group (Appalachian education, the women's movement). (KC)

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The Status of Adult Education Historical Research in the United States

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Early Attempts to Frame a History

Any assessment of the current status of adult education historical research in the United States has to begin with the only book length treatments. James Truslow Adams' Frontiers of American Culture: A Study of Adult Education in a Democracy (1944) was commissioned by the Amercian Association for Adult Education (AAAE) with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation as the culmination of its series of 27 books on the "Social Significance of Adult Education." What Adams produced has to be regarded now as a period piece, an unconvincing attempt to classify adult education institutions and programs, to establish the relation of democracy to adult education, and to create a rationale for adult education to counter anticipated post-war adjustment problems.

C. Hartley Grattan' In Quest of Knowledge (1955) was commissioned by the Fund for Adult Education, a ten year project (1950-1960) of the Ford Foundation to promote liberal education. In commissioning Grattan's book, the Fund wanted to show that liberal adult education had been a concern from early times and that it was deeply embedded in American life and thought. Grattan did that and more, writing a series of historical essays on the Western European backgroud, the British experience, and then selectively tracing adult education in the United States from the colonial period to 1950. Grattan grounded his study upon the

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assumption that adult education was one form of cultural diffusion through which the gap between the intelligentsia who produced and consumed "culture" and the common man could be closed.

Adams and Grattan were professional historians, uninvolved in the adult education movement, who wrote commissioned histories paid for by foundations. In contrast, Malcolm Knowles wrote what was later published in a shorter version as The Adult Education Movement in the United States (1962) as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago while he was the Executive-Director of the Adult Education Association. The questions Knowles addressed grew out of his professional efforts to coordinate the field of adult education. Unlike Adams and Grattan, Knowles believed that the field of adult education could be rationalized, its constituent parts could be classified and proper relationships be established among the parts.

Beyond Adams, Grattan, and Knowles

In 1976 a new interest in the history of adult education was signaled by a special bicentennial issue of Adult Education. In the introductory essay, Kathleen Rockhill, the guest editor, called for historical research that went beyond institutional provisions. Pointing out the pitfalls of neglecting one's past, she called for historical research that would probe the reality of adult education in the daily lives of people and would go beyond public policy that regarded adult education as an entrance to the middle class.

The interest in historical research was further sparked by the organization of a one day pre-conference on the historical

study of adult education at the 1982 Adult Education Research Coference. The pre-conference was held at the next three conferences, but there has no consistent leadership or consensus about the agenda. An occasional newsletter on historical research in adult education was initiated in 1983 and it continues to be published.

The published output in conference papers, journals, and books is so small that one has to be cautious in characterizing the current research trends, but three emphases have been taken. The first is an attempt to understand the heritage of the field, especially the writers and theorists of adult education, and Eduard C. Lindeman in particular. Much of this work has focused on the 1920s and 1930s and much of it is purely descriptive. An example is Moreland and Goldenstein's book on Pioneers in Adult Education, which treats major leaders and episodes in adult education such as the Junto, Black industrial education, the Lyceum, Lowell Institute, Cooper Union, Hull House, New School for Social Research, and the Great Books. The book provides helpful information and can be read with profit, but the authors make no attempt to place these episodes in historical context or to critique the motivations of the founders and the achievements of the institutions.

A second emphasis has been to analyze the ideology that underlies the work of adult educators. An early example is Robert Carlson's The Quest for Conformity: Americanization through Education. Carlson contends that attempts at "Americanization"--shaping persons according to white, Protestant ideas--has

characterized American history and was not just an episode in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The most recent example of this approach is University Adult Education in England and the USA: A Reappraisal of the Liberal Tradition by Richard Taylor, Kathleen Rockhill, and Roger Fieldhouse. Rockhill, an American, examines the liberal tradition in university extension in the United States. The liberal tradition in adult education is characterized as concerned with assisting the individual to understand and challenge his environment by developing skills of critical analysis. In this tradition, a sharp distinction is drawn between education and propaganda. The liberal tradition also includes concern for collective society but this aspect is usually subordinate to the individual. The liberal tradition as embodied within university extension in the United States has been closely linked to democracy, pragmatism, and education. Rockhill believes that the liberal tradition has been wrong in ignoring social and economic structure and for its elitism.

A third emphasis is on universal dimensions of patterns of learning. An example is Cyril Houle's Patterns of Learning: New Perspectives on Life-Span Education. Using a series of case studies of persons and places in previous periods and an examination of adult education that had emerged in Western civilization prior to contemporary institutions, Houle identified patterns (how persons go about learning) and how the patterns are formed into sequential patterns of learning through various life stages. These patterns, or methods, have not changed in history because they are based on basic forms of personal and social experience. Without identifying Knowles directly, it is clear

that Houle presents evidence to counter Knowles' andragogy-discontinuity argument.

Adult Education Among Historians

Social and cultural historians have studied adult education leaders and institutions though they have not usually related their research to the professional concerns of adult educators. Nevertheless, the work of these historians will be indispensable when histories of adult education in the United States are written. The few examples cited here pertain to adult education related to (1) the diffusion of knowledge, (2) cultural intervention by the dominant class, and (3) role or status changes by a subjugated group.

Two recent volumes edited by Oleson and Brown (1976) and Oleson and Voss (1979) focus on the organization of knowledge and the principal institutions involved in the production and diffusion of knowledge, treating specifically scientific and learned societies from colonial times to the civil war and the emergence of specializations and the dominance of universities in the period between the civil war and the first world war. While neither book treats adult education extensively, they do provide the broader context within which the modern movement for adult education must be studied: the relation of adult education to knowledge production and diffusion and the professionalization of knowledge.

For almost a century now the southern Appalachian mountain chain has been the object of both exploitation by economic institutions and social and cultural renewal. Whisnant' <u>All That</u>

Is Native and Fine is a carefully researched analysis of cultural intevention by educated, urban, and middle and upper class liberal "cultural workers" to impose their cultural values upon the culture of the southern mountain people. One instrument of this intervention process was the John C. Campbell Folk School, modeled after one segment of the Danish Folk School movement. The John C. Campbell Folk School centered its attention on reviving the handicraft tradition but gave little attention to economic issues. It sought to reform culture but ignored economic inequities.

This "politics of culture" approach contrasted sharply with the work of the Highlander Folk School which, in the face of powerful opposition, has engaged in labor education, civil rights, and community development since the 1930s. Founded by Myles Horton, Highlander represents another application of the Danish model in the United States (Adams, 1975).

The relation of adult education to various aspects of the women's movement has received considerable attention. Rothman (1978) examined changing ideals and practices from 1870 to the present. She focused particularly on the concept of separate spheres: the view that women's sphere pertained to home and moral values. Women's reform and educational activities outside the home extended this home sphere into the larger community. The women's club movement in the last quarter of the nineteenth century provided opportunity for middle class women to exercise their abilities outside the home in organizations, in cultural activities, and in social reform during the progressive period.

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